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A Guide to the Records of University President Abraham S. Fischler

Nova Southeastern University, Office of the President

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A Guide to the Records of the University President Abraham S. Fischler

Nova Southeastern University Archives
Finding aid created by Monica Haddad
June 2009

I. Descriptive Summary

Provenance: Nova University, Office of the President

Title: Records of University President Abraham S. Fischler

Dates: 1965(1968-1992)1994

Abstract: Administrative records of Abraham S. Fischler, second president of Nova University

Extent: 44 boxes

II. Biographical Sketch

Abraham S. Fischler was born in Brooklyn, New York on January 21, 1928. Over the years, he worked as a public school teacher, university professor, and author before his appointment as President of Nova University. He graduated from City College of New York in 1951 with a Bachelor's in Social Sciences before pursuing graduate degrees. He earned a Master's in Science Education from New York University (1952) and an Ed.D. from Teacher's College at Columbia University (1959).

His career in academia began in 1959 as an assistant professor of education at Harvard Graduate School of Education. In 1962, he moved with his family to work as an associate professor (later professor) at the University of California Berkeley. Through a colleague, he learned of the new education experiment taking place in Broward County, Florida and thus his future aligned with Nova University.

In 1965, he was appointed the James Donn Professor of Education in charge of the science education Ph.D. program in the Behavioral Sciences Center. His appointment officially began on July 1966. He also served concurrently as Dean of Graduate Studies.

In late 1969, he was appointed Executive Vice President by the Board of Trustees after the first university president resigned suddenly. In September 1970, he was appointed President of Nova University by the Board of Trustees. He served in this capacity for twenty-two years until his resignation in July 1992.

Fischler married wife Shirley Balter on April 5, 1949. They raised three children together: Bruce, Michael, and Lori.

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III. Scope and Content Note

Correspondence, legal documents, financial records, memos, reports, subject files, and clippings comprise the bulk of the records of Abraham S. Fischler, second president of Nova University and span the years 1965(1968-1992)1994. The records are divided into four main series: academic affairs, administrative affairs, student affairs, and personal affairs. This arrangement illustrates the main units of the university as well as any records that were of a personal nature to Fischler. There are over ten sub-series within the administrative affairs series. The small size of the university in its first two decades meant that practically all activities and decisions had to pass through the Office of the President.

The first degree programs offered by Nova University after it opened its doors in the fall of 1968 were doctoral degrees in oceanography, physical sciences, and science education. Overcoming early financial struggles was paramount in the dealings of the University until the 1970 federation agreement with New York Institute of Technology (NYIT). The agreement included: \$1.2 million for Nova to pay off outstanding debts; appointed NYIT President Alexander Schure as Chancellor of Nova University; and required a new Board of Trustees with representatives from both schools. NYIT expanded Nova's offerings with an MBA program and undergraduate courses. The federation lasted until November 1985.

One educational innovation that attributed to Nova's success was its move into distance education, which included clusters of students at remote locations, both within and outside of the state of Florida. The early struggles with state governments and universities over Nova's legitimacy are evident in the records. The majority of distance students were enrolled in the National Ed.D. for Educational Leaders program from the Center for the Advancement of Education, established in 1980. Nova University's launch of distance education sites in international locations, particularly in Panama, and to a lesser extent, Colombia, and Jamaica, is extensively documented.

As Nova University added programs, centers, and institutes, it also absorbed smaller local schools with faculty and specialized programs (e.g. psychology in the late 1970's). There is significant coverage of the Law Center's founding in 1974 and growth into new facilities. There are also records on the founding and expansion of the University School. Originally a laboratory school, it became a private K-12 institution. The school was founded by Marilyn Segal, an early Nova graduate, faculty member, and supporter of the university. There were many affiliated entities on Nova University's campus such as the Family Center and Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research.

There are records of development efforts to acquire major gifts and establish scholarships since the university's inception. Records of early attempts to establish a traditional campus with dormitories and student life are also included.

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Fischler did not restrict his energies to Nova University, but was an active member of many community organizations, like United Way of Broward County, and represented Nova's interests at local and state-level associations (e.g. Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF)).

IV. Additional Information on the Records

Abraham S. Fischler was not officially appointed as President of Nova University until September 1970. For this reason, there is more of an education focus to Fischler's records between 1967-1969.

The previous President, Warren J. Winstead, announced his resignation to take effect July 1970 in November 1969. In the months in between, Fischler served as Executive Vice President of the University at the request of the Board of Trustees.

The designation of folders with "Misc." and a letter was the original arrangement of the files. The letter corresponds with the correspondent by organization name or personal last name.

Below is a brief outline of name changes and additions to the University that took place during Fischler's tenure:

- Nova University of Advanced Technology became Nova University, Inc.
- Name changes: The Institute for Early Childhood Education (1973)--Family Center (1975)--Mailman Family Center (1981)-- Mailman Segal Institute for Early Childhood Studies (2002)
- 1976: University School at Coral Springs established
- 1983: Fort Lauderdale Oral School acquired and added to the Mailman Family Center; renamed Ralph J. Baudhuin Oral School of Nova University in 1986; later changed focus to autism and absorbed by Mailman Family Center
- 1986: Behavioral Sciences Center name changed to School of Psychology
- 1987: School of Social Sciences began programs in Family Therapy and Gerontology
- 1989: Law Center dedicated as Shepard Broad Law Center

V. Access or Use Restrictions

Presidential collections are closed to the public. Permission must be obtained from the current University President. Certain files are restricted to protect identities of former staff and/or students.

VI. Folder List

See "Fischler Folder List" for full listing of files.